Christian Mysticism.

A Lecture delivered before the Theological Union of the Hamilton Conference, June 4th, 1907.

BY THE

REV. J. COOPER ANTLIFF, M.A., D.D.

"What is Religion without Mysticism? A Rose without Perfume"

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Forewords.

In the following lecture nothing more than the merest sketch of a very comprehensive subject is attempted. It would have been an easy task to take as the theme some division of the subject, as, for instance, Mediæval Mysticism, or Methodism and Mysticism, or the Mystic Element in certain modern heresies; but in that case one object of the lecture would not have been so likely to be realized, viz., to give such a general introduction to the subject of Christian Mysticism that many of the younger members of the Theological Union would be led to take up the subject for a course of reading. If this end be attained by the lecture, it will be gratefully remembered in the years to come, for it is indeed true that, "there is gold in this land, and the gold of this land is good."

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Christian Mysticism.

When we make the initial enquiry, What is meant by Mysticism? we find ourselves in some difficulty; for it is a word that does not admit of easy definition; this, however, might be presupposed because of the variety of its contents. Dr. Inge, in his Bampton Lecture· delivered in 1899, gives some twenty-six definitions in addition to his own. R. A. Vaughan, in his "Hours With the Mystics," which, notwithstanding his lack of sympathy with the mystics, is probably the best introduction to the study of Mysticism in the English language, derives the term from the Greek verb μυειν, to close, the root of which, μυ, is pronounced by closing the lips. So Mysticism signifies something about which the mouth was to be closed. Hence, the word originally may have been applied to secret things pertaining to religion, including esoteric acts and also doctrines. From the ancient Greek mysteries the term passed over to the Neoplatonists in Alexandria, and from them it came into the Christian Church. Prof. Seth, in the Encyclopædia Britannica, says: "Mysticism is a phase of thought, or, rather, perhaps, of feeling, that appears in connection with the endeavors of the human mind to grasp the Divine essence, or the ultimate reality of things, and to enjoy the blessedness of actual communion with the Highest." Dr. Inge says: "Religious Mysticism may be defined as the attempt to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or, more generally, as the attempt to realize in thought and feeling the immanence of the temporal in the eternal and of the eternal in the temporal." Goethe says: "It is the scholastic of the heart, the dialectic of the feelings," and Vaughan speaks of it as "the poetry of theology."

These short definitions will afford us at least a starting-point in our study of the subject, and from them it will be perceived that it deals with man in relation to the spiritual and divine; and in these days, when Rationalism, Ritualism, and Materialism are so rampant, it is surely a hopeful sign that Mysticism is again coming to the front; for we believe it will prove a valuable antidote to this trinity of evils.

That there is something in Mysticism, using the term in

its widest sense, that meets a need in human nature, appears from the fact that it is found in both ancient and modern times, in both Eastern and Western lands, and in forms of religion as different as Buddhism and Quakerism. Christian Mysticism, like a scarlet thread, is found running through the texture of both orthodox and heterodox sects; so we have it in Romanism and Protestantism, in Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, and in its best form it holds no mean place in our own beloved Methodism. Let me invite you to consider:

I. *Its nature and characteristics.*

So far as its roots are grounded in the teachings of the New Testament, we find, as might be expected, that the writings of St. John, both in his Gospel and epistles, contain many passages that are in accord with its leading principles. St. John is the disciple of the affections, and Mysticism has to do in an especial manner with this part of our nature. Amongst many may be cited: "Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on Him that sent me, and he that seeth me, seeth him that sent me" (John xii. 44-5); "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (xiv. 23). And, again, in the high-priestly prayer, our Lord prayed, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me; and the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one" (xvii. 21-3). In this passage we have the very essence of Christian Mysticism in its purest and most blessed form. In his first epistle, St. John declares: "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." Though St. John especially sets forth this phase of Christian experience, St. Paul also has many passages containing the same teaching; perhaps the most striking is: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." In the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians many passages contain similar teaching.

It will be perceived that there are certain psychological principles and certain theological facts lying at the basis of Mysticism. Amongst these we may specially notice the following:—

(a) That man's spiritual nature is allied to the Divine nature, and consequently man can come into conscious fellowship with God.

(b) That man's understanding can apprehend certain of God's attributes, and so find intellectual delight in contemplating the character of God.

(c) That it is by the way of the feelings or emotions that God is chiefly perceived and His presence enjoyed.

Besides these principles, which are generally accepted, some eminent Mystics have maintained that there is in man a faculty implanted especially for the apprehension of spiritual things—a faith-faculty, which enables man to hold communion with the Father of Spirits. Others, again, have held the doctrine that a divine Spark—an uncreated Light—has been added to the soul, "which is higher than knowledge, higher than love, higher than grace," and that it is by this that man enters into fellowship with God. Others, again, have believed that in the soul of man there is "an image of the Divine, by which God communicates with man."

The theological facts lying at the basis of Christian Mysticism—in its purer forms—are (a) Man's alienation from God by sin; (b) God's personality and moral character; (c) His desire to have the communion, intercepted by sin, restored and maintained; and (d) That God has immediate and direct access to the mind of man, bringing light and joy, and at times even ecstasy.

In addition to these principles there are others, some of which are harmless and others harmful, set forth in the teachings of the great Mystic writers, as, for instance, the Pantheism of John Scotus Erigena, and the Quietism of Madame Guyon. In the writings of almost all the great Mystics there is a tendency, which is to be deplored, to unduly emphasize Christ *in* us, at the expense of Christ *for* us; and, in general, as is seen in the case of the Friends, the subjective element in religion is apt to lead to the undervaluing of the Church and its outward ordinances.

But Christian Mysticism in its best forms is something not to be lightly despised or put aside with a wave of the hand. On account of false conceptions of what Mysticism is, it is not unusual to brand some teaching, which is considered vain, whimsical, and unworthy of serious thought, as mystical; and thus a certain ill-repute is associated in the minds of many with the term *mystical.* Let it be borne in mind, however, that most good things have their counterfeits, and Mysticism is no exception. The Germans have two terms applicable to the general subject—Mystik and Mysticismus.

The former is used in a favourable and the latter in an unfavourable sense. In the absence of two such words in the English language, we employ the adjectives—true and false. It is true Mysticism with which we are dealing, and this is an experience that rises above mechanical forms in religion, and above the mere observance of a fair, outward morality. It is an experience that comes to most, if, indeed, not all, spiritually-minded believers, though it may be brief and seldom; and it cannot be adequately defined by any form of logical expression. It belongs to the table-lands of Christian experience. This makes the study of true Mysticism an inspiration and blessing; for when oppressed with the hum-drum duties that at times seem to drag the spirit to the dust, and when affected by the worldliness that is manifested even in the Church, the remembrance of the experience and lives of the true Mystics comes like a refreshing breeze "from the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense."

II. *History of Christian Mysticism.*

We shall, however, the better understand the nature and tendencies of Christian Mysticism, if we notice in order a few of its most famous teachers. In doing this we pass over the Neoplatonists and Early Church fathers, in whose writings there is much in accord with Mysticism, and call attention to the so-called Dionysius the Areopagite, whose teachings are sometimes taken as the fountain-head of the system. This name is evidently fictitious; for it is now generally admitted by the best judges that some Greek monk about the middle of the fifth century wrote the treatises that go under the name of Dionysius. His writings obtained the readier credence, because he wrote also on Church orders, and advocating, as he did in his "Celestial Hierarchy," the three orders in the ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons, with high claims for clerical authority, many who might readily have discovered that his writings were a forgery accepted them as authentic. His chief doctrines, which greatly affected subsequent Mystics, particularly those of the heretical school, are: (a) The doctrine of Emanation, which he borrowed largely from the Gnostics; (b) Deification, or the absorption of the human soul in the divine nature; (c) That God is above all existence; (d) That Christ is less the Redeemer than remotely (through a long chain of agents) the Illuminator of men; (e) That evil is non-existent; (f) That negation and affirmation constitute the two opposed and yet simultaneous methods of the knowledge of the Infinite.

In this last principle we have the very heart of his Mysticism as he teaches the *via negativa* way of realizing God, which method strips Him of one attribute after another, as they indicate condition and relation, until ultimately we reach *nothingness;* and thus it follows that the highest knowledge of God is mystic ignorance. In harmony with these views, Dionysius taught that the eminent saint may attain an indescribable condition of spiritual experience, a climax of abstraction, "an approach towards the beatific vision of those who are supposed to gaze directly on the Divine Essence in Heaven." He exhorts his disciples to seek this ecstatic condition by the three stages of purification, illumination, and perfection, a process that, in some form or other, is urged by almost all who followed him as teachers of the mystic experience.

Leaving Dionysius, who belonged to the Eastern Church, we next find the Victorines, in the twelfth century, as the great promulgators of the Mystic doctrines. These are Hugo of St. Victor and his pupil, Richard of St. Victor, who represent Mysticism in the Western Church. The name "Victorines" is derived from the celebrated monastery of St. Victor, in the suburbs of Paris, where these two great Churchmen lived and taught. They endeavored to join Mysticism and Scholasticism, a union of two diverse elements that after a while again fell apart; and this was to be expected, for the one was largely a religion that unduly exalted the feelings and the other a religion that unduly exalted the reason. In their doctrine, however, there is much that is beautiful; as when Hugo says: "The way to ascend into God is to descend into thyself," and Richard writes: "The ascent is through self above self; that is, forgetting the things that are behind. Let him that is athirst to see God clear his mirror, let him make his spirit bright. By mental ecstasy man is led out of himself and contemplates not through a mirror darkly, but in simple truth." Surely in these words we have a re-echo of the sublime truth taught by our Lord, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Passing by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who also was a French ecclesiastic and a contemporary with the two Victorines, and whose hymn, "Jesus, the very thought of Thee," is such a precious gem, and whose Mysticism was of the saner sort, we proceed to consider the great apostle of German Mysticism—Meister Eckhart.

This great philosopher and devout Christian, who died in 1329, belonged to the Dominican Order, and was prior of Erfurt. In his later years he was bitterly persecuted by

the grand master of his order because of his sympathy with the Brethren of the Free Spirit; and afterwards he was similarly treated by Archbishop Henry of Cologne. The bull of Pope John XXII., dealing with his case, however, showed a milder spirit.

The following quotation from his writings will give some idea of his teaching. He says: "God is alike near to all creatures. I have a power in my soul which enables me to perceive God. I am as certain as that I live that nothing is so near me as God. He is nearer to me than I am to myself. It is a part of His very essence that He should be nigh and present to me. God is in all things and places alike, and is ever ready to give Himself to us so far as we are able to receive Him. He knows God aright who sees Him in all things." We have here the doctrine of God's immanence, which the past half-century has popularized, clearly sets forth, reminding us of the lines of Tennyson:—

"Speak to Him, for He hears,
And spirit with spirit can meet,
Closer is He than breathing, and
Nearer than hands and feet."

Eckhart, in his daring speculations, seems at times to anticipate modern German idealism; this is seen in the way he deals with the abstract ground of the Divine Essence; in his doctrine of the Incarnation as ever-renewing itself; and in the making of Redemption something of the nature of a Divine self-development; but to his credit it must be said that his mystic pantheism was associated with an ascetic morality, for both he and his immediate successors insisted on the necessity of the purification of the soul in order to enjoy union with God; and he wisely says: "If your will is right, you cannot go wrong."

The pupils of Eckhart were: John Ruysbrock, Henry Suso, Tauler, and the anonymous writer of "Theologia Germania," certainly a noble band, and precursors of the Protestant Reformation, in their insistence on the necessity of spiritual religion. Take this teaching of John of Ruysbrock: "In the Christian life are three stages—(a) the active, with its appropriate virtues of humility, love, and righteousness; (b) the inner life of Divine illumination; and (c) the contemplative, of absorption in God. In this last, the highest stage, the soul is united with God without means —it sinks into the vast abyss of the Godhead." This teaching we may accept, but must demur when he says: "So far as the distinction of persons goes, there is no more God or

creature, yet we must be conscious of ourselves in God and God in ourselves."

John Tauler, who died in 1361, was a great preacher, and declared the great Pauline doctrine of justification by faith. It is said he was led into the light by a pious layman—Nicholas of Basle. He sought the truth for two years, but when it came it so affected his preaching that men fainted under it, and lay as dead. His Mysticism was of a robust and pleasing type. Passing over Suso, we may profitably spend a few moments in considering the remarkable little book, "German Theology," which Miss Winkworth has translated into English, and has an introduction by Chas. Kingsley. The author probably was one of the society called "The Friends of God," which was an order made up of laymen and ecclesiastics, women and children, whose object was not political, but spiritual—to develope true religion in the soul. This was one of those societies that amidst the darkness of the Middle Ages kept the light of God's truth burning, and amidst superstition and ignorance held aloft the torch of truth. "German Theology" is not a ponderous tome of divinity, as its name might suggest, but a little book made up of some fifty-four brief chapters, that are so short that the whole book may be read in three or four hours—though it should be read slowly in order to be inwardly digested. It is of the same class of literature as Thomas a Kempis' "Imitation of Christ," or Bogatsky's "Golden Treasury" —a book of devotional reading for the closet. Luther places it next to the Bible and St. Augustine. The following is the whole of Chapter XIV., and is headed, "Of three stages by which a man is led upwards till he attaineth true perfection":—

"Now, be assured that no one can be enlightened unless he be first cleansed or purified and stripped. So also no one can be united with God unless he be first enlightened. Thus there are three stages: First, the purification; secondly, the enlightening; thirdly, the union. (The *purification* concerns those who are beginning or repenting, and is brought to pass in a three-fold wise, by contrition and sorrow for sin, by full confession, by hearty amendment.) The *enlightening* belongeth to such as are growing, and also taketh place in three ways, to wit: by the eschewal of sin, by the practice of virtue and good works, and by the willing endurance of all manner of temptations and trials. The *union* belongeth to such as are perfect, and also is brought to pass in three ways, to wit: by pureness and singleness of

heart, by love, and by the contemplation of God, the Creator of all things."

The keynote of the book is the proposition that selfishness is the essence of sin; and the terms "I, me, my, mine" are repeated again and again with the exhortation to get rid of the spirit they represent. The ideal the book portrays of self-renunciation is most beautiful and invigorating, and the reader, who is at all sympathetic, finds its atmosphere sweet and bracing; indeed, the book is a religious tonic. Its faults are—a kind of dualism, "a belief that the Divine begins where the human leaves off," and the use of language occasionally which seemed to indicate a *Deification* of the advanced believer. What is meant by this term may perhaps be best explained by a brief quotation from Tauler, who speaks in the following terms of the advanced believer: "He flings himself into the Divine abyss, in which he dwelt eternally before he was created; then when God finds the man thus firmly down and turned towards Him, the Godhead bends and nakedly descends into the depths of the pure waiting soul, drawing it up into the uncreated essence, so that the spirit becomes one with Him." Though the idea is never so bluntly expressed in the "German Theology," yet it is there, and it is a serious blemish.

Striding over the Reformation era, we now light upon a Mystic whose character and teachings have a peculiar interest. I refer to the famous shoemaker and glovemaker of Gorlitz—Jacob Boehme, or, as his name is often given, Behmen. This remarkable man, who has been described as one part Mystic and three parts Theosophist, was born in 1575 and died in 1624, aged forty-nine years. The only education he received was at the town school of Seidenburg, a mile from his home. In his years of early manhood the great problems of religion and philosophy were pondered by him as he pursued his humble calling, and when thirty-seven years of age he found himself suddenly famous by the publication, surreptitiously, of his "Aurora." In due course there followed other books, including: "The Three Principles," "The Forty Questions," "The Signatura Rerum," and "The Way to Christ." The only treatises published with his consent were not those of a speculative and philosophical character, but those whose aim was to cultivate the spiritual and practical in the life of believers. He had a fierce persecutor in the minister of his parish, a Mr. Richter, who seems to have been a firm believer in the proverb, "No shoemaker beyond his last." But Boehme carried himself with dignity and kindliness, and whatever judgment may be passed on his scientific and philosophical

writings, all must confess he was truly a Christian man. How widely opinions respecting him differ will be perceived by the following quotations. Bishop Warburton says: "Boehme's works would disgrace Bedlam at full moon." John Wesley says: "Sublime nonsense, inimitable bombast, fustion not to be paralleled." But, on the other hand, Sir Isaac Newton thought it worth his while to shut himself up three months in order to study Boehme, whose teaching on "Attraction and the Laws of Motion" "seemed to him to have great value"; and Dr. Alex. Whyte, in his most interesting *brochure*, entitled "Jacob Boehme, an appreciation," says: "It was a great day for William Law, and through him, it was, and will yet be, acknowledged a great day for English theology, when he chanced at an old bookstall upon 'The Three Principles,' Englished by a barrister of the Inner Temple." It is said of Charles the First that when he read the English translation of "The Forty Questions," he wrote to the publisher, that if Jacob Boehme was no scholar, then the Holy Ghost was still with men; and that if he was a learned man, the book was one of the best inventions ever written. In this book he attempts to answer questions then discussed at the leading German universities, which were collected and submitted to him as a test of his capability. Dr. Whyte bears his own personal testimony in these words: "For myself, immediately after The Psalms of David I put Boehme's 'Holy Week,' and the prayers scattered up and down through his 'True Repentance,' and, besides Boehme, Bishop Andrew's 'Private Devotions.' I have discovered no helps to my own devotional life for a moment to set beside Boehme and Andrews."

If I give one or two brief extracts from his writings, you may the better perceive the character of the man and his visions. He says: "The gate of the Divine mystery was sometimes so opened to me that in one quarter of an hour I saw and knew more than if I had been many years together at a university. I, therefore, turned my heart to God to praise Him for it. For I saw and knew the Being of all Beings, the Byss and Abyss, as also the generation of the Son and Procession of the Spirit. I saw the descent and original of the World and of all its creatures. I saw in their order and outcome the Divine world, the angelical world, Paradise, and then this fallen and dark world of our own. I saw the beginning of the good and the evil, and the true origin and existence of each of them. * * * For twelve years this went on in me. Sometimes the truth would hit me like a sudden smiting storm of rain, and then there would be the clear sunshine after rain." Again, he

says: "When I had wholly hazarded my life upon what I was doing, my whole spirit seemed to me suddenly to break through the gates of hell, and to be taken up into the arms and heart of God. I can compare it to nothing else but the Resurrection at the Last Day. For then, with all reverence I say it, with the eyes of my spirit I saw God, I saw both what God is and I saw how God is what He is."

Though we may say this was mere enthusiasm, yet surely it was enthusiasm of a high and blessed sort, and a little of it in our ordinary, prosaic, matter-of-fact life would do us no harm. As he lay a-dying, he said to his weeping son: "Open the door and let in that music." So he departed to the music of Heaven and the fuller vision of God. Though he has been dead almost three centuries he yet speaks, and German philosophico-theological thought in some quarters still bears his impress.

Before leaving the German Mystics, let me call attention to a little book by J. G. Fichte (1762-1814) of a mystical character, that contains some striking passages that remind one of the Methodist doctrine of Christian Perfection. It is entitled, "The Way Towards the Blessed Life," and contains the winding up of his system of philosophy, and the last wine is the best. This book, which propounds a kind of lofty and stoical religious Mysticism, indicates the possibility of the subjective limits of our rational nature being surpassed, and life being made blessed by our partaking of the Divine nature which is *love*. One or two brief extracts must suffice: "True life is Love, and as Love holds and possesses within itself its own object—the object of this Love—bound up, interpenetrated, transfused, and wholly absolved in it—Eternally One and the Same Love. Blessedness itself consists in Love, and in the Eternal satisfaction of Love; and it is inaccessible to Reflexion, it can only be negatively expressed by the understanding, and hence by our description, which is the language of the understanding. We can only show that the blessed live free from pain, trouble, and privation. Wherein this blessedness positively consists cannot be described, but must be immediately felt." All which sounds very much like the Methodist phrase, "Religion is better felt than told." Fichte has also the following wise statement: "Unblessedness comes from doubt, which continually drags us to and fro; and of Uncertainty, which spreads around us an impenetrable night, in which our feet can find no sure path."

Leaving the German Mystics, let us turn our attention to those of Spain; and of these, the most famous are John of the Cross and St. Theresa, who were contemporaries

and lived in the sixteenth century. Though Theresa was the elder, we will refer first to John (Spanish, Juan), who was her faithful lieutenant, when the infirmities of years made her need such a helper. They were leaders in a Counter Reformation to that of Luther and his co-workers, and did at least something by their successful efforts to revive the Carmelite order to rehabilitate the demoralized Roman Catholic Church in Spain. John obtained the title "*of the Cross*" by his fanatical love of "crosses," that is, any kind of privation and suffering that he could inflict on himself or that others would oblige him by inflicting on him. He was, doubtless, sincere and devout, according to his light; but the record of his life is somewhat painful reading, for it is sad to see how such a noble man—and he was truly such—could be the victim of such a false conception of the character of God and His precious will. His most famous work is his "*Hymn of the Obscure Night,*" which is the Mystic Pilgrim's Progress, being a kind of allegory setting forth the soul's search for rest and satisfaction in God. In the recently published book of Dr. Robertson Nicoll, entitled, "The Garden of Nuts," a book containing some very pleasant Mystical doctrine, may be found a beautiful translation of part of John's hymn. The following is a translation of a few lines by Hutchings:—

"In a dark night
Burning with ecstasies wherein I fell,
O happy plight!
Unheard, I left the house wherein I dwell,
The inmates sleeping peacefully and well.

"Secure from sight,
By unknown ways, in unknown robes concealed,
O happy plight!
And to no eye revealed,
My home in sleep as in the tomb was sealed.

"Sweet night, in whose blessed fold
No human eye beheld me, and mine eye
None could behold;
Only for Guide had I
His face whom I desired so ardently."

The purport of this remarkable hymn is the absorption of sense, will, understanding—yea, all—in God.

A grave defect of the theosophy of John of the Cross is that he pursues the *negative way*. The world simply does not exist, as far as he is concerned; nothing but God and human souls have existence. Surely this is an unhealthy and unreal condition of thought. But though a Mystic, he was no recluse, and he was such a fiery and eloquent preacher that we do not wonder that he stirred up the displeasure and anger of the great ecclesiastics, whose luxury and self-seeking were rebuked alike by his words and works; but he endured imprisonment and other hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The following beautiful and impassioned prayer will give a glimpse of the spiritual character of the man:—

"O sweetest love of God, too little known; he who has found Thee is at rest; let everything be changed, O God, that we may rest in Thee, everywhere with Thee, O my God, everywhere all things with Thee—as I wish, O my Love, all for Thee—nothing for me, everything for Thee. All sweetness and delight for Thee, none for me—all bitterness and trouble for me, none for Thee. O my God, how sweet to me Thy presence, who art the supreme God! I will draw near to Thee in silence, and will uncover thy feet —(reference to Ruth iii. 17)—that it may please Thee to unite me to Thyself, making my soul Thy bride. I will rejoice in nothing, till I am in Thine arms; O Lord, I beseech Thee, leave me not for a moment, because I know not the value of mine own soul."

But the greatest of Spanish Mystics is St. Theresa. Though Vaughan criticises her somewhat harshly, she has found two valiant defenders in Chas. Kingsley and Dr. A. Whyte. In that popular novel, "John Inglesant," by Henry Shorthouse, her life in the book, entitled, "The Flaming Heart," is made to influence powerfully for good the hero of the story. No one can study her character and work without getting an upward impulse in the spiritual life. She was born in Old Castile, on March 28th, 1515, and died in 1582, at the age of sixty-seven. She was born into the family of a Spanish grandee, but happily the home was a devout one, and from early life she was surrounded by religious influences. She entered a Carmelite convent when eighteen years of age; but her position during the twenty years that followed this step was disagreeable to her on account of her deficiency in the very characteristic that afterwards shone most conspicuously in her—spirituality. She bears this witness against herself: "In God I had no pleasure; to go to the oratory was a vexation to me,

and prayer itself a constant effort.'' When thirty-nine years of age her conversion took place, and the force of her character and her earnest religious spirit began at once to impress all about her, and, as a consequence, to excite the ill-will of the unspiritual and worldly-minded with whom she had to live. Her life was a strange blending of ''locutions,'' ecstasies, and common-sense, practical endeavours to establish convents, where strict discipline should be maintained; for amidst all her Mystical experiences she showed herself ''a woman of affairs.'' Her visions were vivid and frequent. She relates how the cross of her rosary was snatched from her hand on one occasion, and when returned it was made of jewels more brilliant than diamonds; visible, however, to her alone. She had often an acute pain in her side, and she fancied that an angel came to her with a lance tipped with fire, which he stuck into her heart. This is a favourite subject of Spanish artists, and the picture of it in the frontispiece of her biography gives the name to the book—''The Flaming Heart.'' But her writings have much that prove her worthy of the canonization bestowed upon her by Pope Gregory XV., forty years after her death.

The chief of her writings is ''The Way of Perfection.'' Dr. A. Whyte questions whether William Law would have written his book on Christian Perfection had not St. Theresa written on the same subject before him. And, as is well known, Law's book on the subject greatly influenced John Wesley, who wrote a well-known treatise on the same subject, so that Methodists owe something, at least indirectly, to this Spanish Mystic. Amongst her other writings are: ''Seven Meditations on the Lord's Prayer,'' ''Letters,'' ''The Foundations,'' and ''The Castle of the Soul.'' Let me give one or two extracts from her writings that will probably whet your appetites for more:—

''Let no one say, 'If I fall into sin, then I cannot pray.' In this the devil turned his most dreadful batteries against me. He said to me that it showed very little shame in me if I could have the face to pray, who had just been so wicked. And under that snare of Satan I actually as good as gave up all prayer for a year and a half. This was nothing else than to throw myself straight down to hell. * * * What folly to the stumbler to run away from the light.''

''God is the soul of my soul. He engulfs into Himself my soul. He enlightens and strengthens my soul day and night. He gives my soul more and more grace.''

''Settle yourself in solitude, and you will come upon God

in yourself, and then entreat Him as your Father, and relate to Him your troubles. Those who can in this manner shut themselves up in the little heaven of their hearts, where He dwells, who made heaven and earth, let them be sure that they walk in the most excellent way; they lay their pipe right up to the fountain."

The following passage "on praise, precedency, and points of honor" is worth pondering (especially if the action of the Stationing Committee is a disappointment):—

"Observe carefully the stirrings of your heart in matters of superiority. Pray to be delivered from such thoughts as these: 'I am older; I deserve better; I have laboured more; I have more talent.' Such thoughts are the plague and poison of the heart. Believe me, if there remain in you any allowed hankerings after the praise of men, though you may have spent many years in prayer, or, rather, in idle forms of prayer, you have made no progress, and never will till your heart is crucified to the approval and praise of men. If you feel in yourself any point of honour, any pride, any desire of eminence or pre-eminence, you must free yourself from that abominable bondage, and for that chain there is no hammer and file like humility and prayer."

Such words as these could not have been written by any one who was not both a psychologist and a true saint of God, and the study of such a character makes one think the better of our poor humanity.

Passing from Spain, we will now take a glimpse of the phase of Mysticism known as "Quietism," which had its headquarters in France, though Molinos, in Spain (1640-1697), was one of its eminent advocates. By Quietism is meant a religious experience in which the soul by contemplation and holy love is lost in God, and so finds rest or quiet, being freed from both outward ritual forms and the active duties of religion; which condition is regarded by its advocates and professors as the highest state of religion. The chief leaders in this phase of Mysticism were Madame Guyon and Archbishop Fenelon, but especially the former, whose history and work we will now consider.

Madame Guyon, whose maiden name was Jeanne Marie Bouviéres de la Mothe, was born at Montargis, a small town fifty miles south of Paris, on April 13th, 1648, and died June 9th, 1717. When only sixteen years of age she was married to Jacques Guyon, a man of great wealth; but some twenty-two years older than herself, and of a

disposition and character utterly unsuited for a young lady of her tastes and temperament, and consequently, as might be expected, the marriage proved an unhappy one. When eleven years of age she accidentally came across a copy of the Bible in the Dominican Convent, in which she was a pupil, and it at once became her *Vade Mecum*. It was in 1668, fourteen years after her marriage, that she entered upon a new religious experience, which was the result of some words spoken by a monk, to whom she had related her earnest but vain strivings after true religion. His words were: "Your efforts have been unsuccessful, Madame, because you have sought *without* what you can only find *within*. Accustom yourself to seek God in your heart, and you will not fail to find Him." This casual remark introduced her into the Mystic life. Subsequently a Franciscan monk, who enjoyed much spiritual communion with God, led her to a personal trust and rest in Christ, and hence her Mysticism was of a more evangelical character than that of many Mystics. She drew up a formal deed of consecration, which was duly signed and sealed with her ring. The following were its terms: "I henceforth take Jesus to be mine. I promise to receive Him as husband to me, and I give myself to Him, unworthy though I am, to be His spouse. I ask of Him, in the marriage of spirit with spirit, that I may be of the same mind with Him; meek, pure, nothing in myself, and united in God's will, and pledged as I am to be His, I accept as part of my marriage portion the temptations and sorrows, the crosses and contempt, which fell on Him."

In this document there will be noticed what is a marked feature of her writings, the employment of the marital relation to set forth the affection between Christ and the believer. It is charged against her by some that the figure is carried beyond legitimate limits, and so offends good taste; but it should be borne in mind that her writings, especially her poems, were not written for the public in general, but for those like-minded, and unto the pure all things are pure. In 1674 she entered into what she calls her state of privation or desolation, which reminds us of "The Obscure Night" of John of the Cross, or of the loss of his roll by John Bunyan's Pilgrim. She had not yet fully learned the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith; but after a time the darkness and doubt vanished and she reached the Land of Beulah, where the sun shines and the birds sing day and night. Her asceticism, when she was forty years of age, is indicated by the following passage in her autobiography: "Almost every day I took

a scourging, and I often wore the iron girdle without its lessening the freshness of my face." In this we perceive the influence of Roman Catholic teaching, and yet in her writings we see that she came to understand that salvation is by faith in Christ, and in her later years she had what may be fairly called a jubilant experience.

In 1676, when she was twenty-eight years old, her husband died, leaving her with three children; and she henceforth devoted her life to charity. She found an earnest helper in Father La Combe, a priest who for some years had considerable influence over her and her charities. Her brother, Pere de la Mothe, seemed to have conceived a violent hatred against La Combe, that led to his being imprisoned and ultimately he became mad. Madame Guyon's views were suspected of heresy, and she was also subjected to harsh treatment, and passed a season of imprisonment at Vincennes, and also in the Bastile. Fortunately, in 1694, she met Fenelon, who espoused her cause and her teaching. The leading tenets of her creed were: That religion is chiefly concerned with the inner life, and that it is possible to have our will completely lost in God's will. She especially emphasized the doctrine of disinterested love to God. It was this last-named principle that led to the famous dispute between Fenelon and Bossuet—the Eagle of Meaux. In this controversy Bossuet secured a Papal condemnation of his great rival's views, but the sympathy of many of us will be on the other side.

In the following year, 1700, a clerical council pronounced the character of Madame Guyon to be above reproach, and she was released from imprisonment, and the succeeding fifteen years were spent by her in a manner befitting a saint. Her writings, both prose and poetry, were numerous, but it is by her hymns, translated by William Cowper, that she is chiefly known to the English reader. Her influence has been confessedly most potential on the Society of Friends, to which fact Professor J. Rendel Harris gives eloquent testimony in his article on "The Mysticism of Madame Guyon, in *The London Quarterly Review,* of October, 1899. In the early years of my own ministry, I met with a remark of Madame Guyon's, which I have ever since treasured, and which has often found a response in my own personal experience—"O my Father, it seems to me sometimes as if Thou didst forget every other being, in order to think only of my faithless and ungrateful heart."

Something of the blessed experience of this devoted woman, who endeavored to quiet and behave herself as a child that is weaned of his mother, may be surmised from

the following words, written when a prisoner at Vincennes:—

"I used to compose hymns, which the maid, who served me, learned by heart as fast as I composed them, and we used to sing your praises, O my God! I regarded myself as a little bird you were keeping in your cage for your pleasure, and who ought to sing to fulfil her condition of life."

The hymn of which she speaks runs as follows in the English rendering:—

"A little bird am I,
Shut from the fields of air,
And in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there,
Well pleased a prisoner to be,
Because, my God, it pleaseth Thee."

Surely only a bird of Paradise could warble such delicious strains.

Leaving the continent of Europe, and glancing over the British Isles, we find amongst those specially eminent in the ranks of the true Mystics, Walter Hilton, a canon of Thurgarton; Julian, a nun, of Carrow, who lived before the Reformation; in more recent times, Henry Scougall, for one year Regent and three years Professor of Philosophy in King's College, Aberdeen; Geo. Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, and William Law, a non-juring clergyman of the Anglican Church.

A few words only concerning these famous men must suffice. Henry Scougall, who died in 1678, when twenty-eight years of age, published a year before his death a book with a preface by Bishop Burnett—"The Life of God in the Soul of Man." This book, which made him famous, was a favorite with John Wesley, and doubtless had considerable influence in developing his religious life, as has been shown by the Rev. D. Butler, in his little but interesting book, entitled, "Henry Scougall and the Oxford Methodists." Scougall maintained the doctrine of God's immediate presence in the soul of the believer, affecting both his intellectual and moral nature; giving impulses, feelings, and knowledge that cannot be clearly expressed in the language of reason. His Mystical views are sane and inspiring, and the study of his character and writings seem to lift one into the atmosphere of heaven.

George Fox, who, like Jacob Boehme, was a shoemaker, is too well known to require any extended notice. Born in 1624, and dying in 1691, he lived in a century when formality and ritual observances were eating out the very vitals of spiritual religion. He felt it was borne in upon him to call attention to the need of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the individual believer; and with profound spirituality he conjoined the highest ethical teaching. In his rebound from formalism he went to an extreme of simplicity, discarding even the two sacraments; but notwithstanding this, we may well rank him as a true prophet of God, and his Mystic doctrine contained a rich blessing for the Churches.

William Law (1686-1761), the prince of English Mystics, lived in an age when his life and teaching presented a striking contrast to his surroundings. Amidst the prevalent unbelief and ungodliness he kept the lamp of saintliness burning, and in season and out of season urged upon all Christian men, and especially the clergy, his favourite doctrine, that "nothing Godly can be alive in us but what has *all its* life from the Spirit of God living and breathing in us."

His greatest work is his "Serious Call." Gibbon, Dr. Johnson, Doddridge, and John Wesley speak of it in the most eulogistic terms; and, though now but seldom read, it is worth scores of the religious books teeming from the press to-day. The title of the book in which Law developes his Mysticism is, "The Spirit of Prayer and the Spirit of Love." As we have before stated, Law was greatly influenced by Jacob Boehme, and though he avoided many of the latter's extravagances, yet he went much further than John Wesley approved, and on this account a rupture occurred between them.

The English Mystics were well represented in the seventeenth century by the great divines known as the Cambridge Platonists, the chief of whom were Ralph Cudworth, Henry More, Benj'n Whichcote, and John Smith. The Mysticism of these men was healthy and vigorous, being free from the vagaries and excresences of the Continental Mystics.

In our own times there are not wanting examples of Mystics, more or less pronounced, as, for instance, Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll, Dr. A. Whyte, and the Welsh revivalist, Evan Roberts. A Canadian Mystic in the humble walks of life has recently died, in the person of Ann Preston, familiarly known as "Holy Ann"—an aged Toronto Metho-

dist. She had a remarkable experience, living in the most blessed and intimate communion with God; and the story of how she learned to read her Bible as a direct answer to prayer reminds one of some of the experiences of Boehme. God still dwells with men and speaks to them in ways beyond our power of explanation.

III. *Concluding Remarks.*

In concluding this lecture, we would offer a few remarks of a practical character:—

1. The first is a word of warning. Mysticism, having to do chiefly with the emotions, is apt to run into extravagance, and, therefore, needs to be constantly guarded and guided by a wise understanding. The practical evil of acting from mere *impulse* under the guise of following the directions of the Holy Spirit is sadly proved in the Peasants' War in Germany, when Muenzer, in the sixteenth century, led so many to disaster and death at the Battle of Frankenhausen; and has had lamentable consequences in our own Dominion in recent times. The undue emphasis laid by many Mystics on the subjective as opposed to the objective in religious teaching is to be avoided. Mere feeling can never be acepted as guide when it contradicts the plain teachings of the Holy Scriptures. The so-called New Theology has its weakness here, and many of its doctrines are simply a rehabilitation of the discarded errors of the Mystics of the fourteenth century; as, for instance, the immanence of God in a Patheistic sense, the community of man's nature with that of Christ's in a Unitarian sense, and the divinity of man in the same sense as the Divinity of Christ. In Christian Science, so-called, we find elements of false Mysticism, founded on false philosophy, so that the unreality of evil is affirmed, and consequently the doctrine of the Divine righteousness is overlooked while emphasizing the truth of the love of God. The element of truth in Christian Science of the soul's immediate knowledge of God, in which it agrees with true Mysticism, is one of the causes of its acceptance by many of whom we might expect better things.

2. Our second remark is a word of exhortation. Let it be borne in mind that religion must not be treated as a subject of the reason only, or as relating simply to conduct. The emotions and feelings must be given a place in religion, and that by no means an insignificant one. The Mystic element gives flavour to piety and developes spirituality. It has close kinship to the doctrine of Perfect Love or Christian Perfection. It asserts the right of the be-

liever as a Son of God to direct and constant communion with God, his Heavenly Father. There is a Mystic phrase that, I will confess, has haunted me for weeks and been fraught with rich blessing—"The practice of the presence of God." How the thought of God's abiding Presence and Fellowship helps us to bear life's burdens and responsibilities, and lights up the pathway of stern and perhaps painful duty. Would that all who stand in our pulpits had this blessed experience! If we have this, our ministry will have an element neither literary culture nor theological learning can give—an indefinable something that will be perceived by our hearers that will give added force and power to our declarations of the Word of God; and this Mystic Element was never more needed than to-day. Let not the fear of being branded as enthusiastic hinder our endeavours to obtain this quality, so shall we know the meaning of those Mystic words, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One and know all things." We will conclude with the prayer of a great Mystic:

"If there be in Thy Eternity before Thee, some One Body or Kingdom of Thy children, not a division, not a tribe, not a party, but one that includes all, one that by principles and sympathies in common with all offers sacrifices of thanksgiving for all, and communicates blessings to all; then I pray, if it seem good in Thy sight, that I may be associated with that Body.

"Or, if there be a people made up of the innocent and the redeemed of all planets, systems, and their heavens, who, being neither shut up in the limits of self-love, nor in the individuality of any one heaven, but who, heartily loving the whole outborn variety of Thy Love and Fulness, desire to include the utmost diversity of genius and character in their Unity, then I desire and pray in submission to Thy Holy Will, that I may be qualified for admission amongst that central, all-related, and embracing people. Or, if it be rather for Thy glory, and for the good of all, that I be kept watching daily at the gates, and waiting at the posts of the doors of the least and outermost mansions of Thy Eternal House, then my only prayer is—Thy Will be my Heaven." Amen.